

Birth Promise
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Today's my birthday. That's right. April 14, 19—. (Sorry, you don't get to know the rest of it.) This tells you that I'm at least over twenty-one because until you're twenty-one, you're always talking about your age. You know, how soon you'll be sixteen, and you can get your license or eighteen and you'll be a legal adult. (I've never quite figured out what you get with eighteen besides voting and dying in war privileges.) And twenty-one pretty much opens every secular door on earth. Nope, after twenty-one it's all downhill from there. Anyway, I digress.

Today's my birthday, and it feels special. Of course, birthdays always feel special, don't they? No one else can feel the specialness in it, or even cares about it. But you can and that seems to be enough.

All sorts of important events happened on April 14. The satellite Discoverer II was launched, the Titanic sank (actually it hit the iceberg on the fourteenth and finished sinking on the fifteenth), the first edition of Noah Webster's dictionary was published. (Now that's a party stopper, isn't it?) I'm sure there are some famous people who have the same birth date, but I really don't want to share the spotlight with them, 'cause this story has to do with me!

I was born in Corning, California. That's a little town in northern California. I was the only baby in the hospital so every time I cried, my mother knew it was me.

One of my earliest recollections is my mother telling me about the months before I was born. What she told me has stayed with me and impacted my life more than anything else has.

She told me that every day a minister from one of the local churches would walk by our house on his way to and from work. He would stop at the house and ask if he could pray for the unborn baby. He was not the minister of my parents' church, nor was he trying to recruit them to attend his church. His only comment of explanation was (and I quote my mother's memory), "I feel God has great plans for this baby." And then they would pray. My parents' minister never stopped by, but this minister faithfully prayed for the unborn baby (me) because he felt God had special plans for me. I have never forgotten that.

I remembered it when basketball came easily to me, and I could finally beat my older brother in a game of Pony. Maybe God was calling me to be the first female pro basketball player. Ann Meyers beat me to it.

I especially remembered in my senior year in high school when my birthday fell on Easter. I won the Valley singles tennis championship, was crowned prom queen, and then selected valedictorian. Boy, you won't believe what went through my mind then: Wimbledon, Miss America, Nobel Peace Prizes.

I remembered it again when I was selected teacher of the year once and coach of the year three times. I began thinking that I was the educational savior. And I remembered it not too long ago when I sold my first short story to *STRAIGHT* magazine and thought the publishing world would be beating down my door.

Of course, I haven't mentioned all the things that happened in between: my brother consistently pounding me in basketball; my voice cracking in the middle of a

song in front of the entire church; losing in tennis to players I was supposed to beat; going through four years of high school with only two dates; and graduating from college with a humble 3.12 grade point average. Nor have I mentioned the number of students who have criticized my teaching or the team championships we lost because of poor coaching strategies. And I haven't shown many people the boxes of rejection letters and returned manuscripts I keep hidden in the closet of the extra bedroom. But despite all of these setbacks and everyday occurrences, I have never forgotten that anonymous minister's words, "God has great plans for this baby," because I know two things. One—God makes promises, and two—God keeps them.

I have no idea what "great" might equate to in God's eyes for me. It's quite possible it could be the same as what I would consider great. Renowned author. Famous tennis player or coach. National Teacher of the Year. Or it could be something a little less "awesome" but much more "effective," for Christ did say in Mark 9:35, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." I'm sure that's a promise. He also said in 1 Corinthians 3:18, 19, ". . . If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool' so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight." Or the gist of Matthew 6:2: ". . . do not . . . as the hypocrites do . . . to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full."

No, over the years I have come to realize that "great" to God may not be the same thing as "great" to the world, but that's OK. In my heart, based on the promise of a minister I never knew, I know God has great plans for me. Some of them may have already occurred without my knowing, and others are probably still ahead. That's why "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances" (Philippians 4:11), because I know God has placed me there for a purpose. That's why, when disappointments come my way—not getting the job, not selling the story—I can bounce back because I know had God wanted me to have it, then I would have had it.

I feel pretty special knowing what that minister told my mother. I feel like the young Samuel or David or Mary. I think that's why my mother told me right from the start. But I also know that all people share one specific promise, even if some didn't have a minister stopping by and praying for them before they were born. And that promise is— "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart" (Jeremiah 1:5).

The Bible is full of promises. As soon as we accept Christ as our Savior, we are born again, and all those promises are our—birth promises.